

**A BOOK OF  
PREFACES  
[OPUS 13]**

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A book of prefaces [Opus 13] by H. L. Mencken

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**H. L. MENCKEN**

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A Book of Prefaces

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BY H. L. MENCKEN

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By  
H. L. Mencken

[Opus 13]

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Second (Revised) Edition



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## PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

The discussion of these essays, since their first publication, has been carried on at considerable length and with no little emission of heat. Some of the critics who dissent from their doctrine have attacked them with the utmost vigour, and they have been defended no less stoutly. The reviews so far printed cover a great deal more space than the essays themselves. Several reviewers, in fact, have returned to them more than once.

I have been at pains to take no part in this discussion, but it goes without saying that I have observed it with agreeable sentiments. There is, first of all, an author's natural delight at seeing his work strike fire. There is, secondly and more importantly, the satisfaction of witnessing the appearance of a vigorous earnestness in a debate upon the arts. The chief trouble with our criticism, taking one year with another, is that it is too academic, too objective, too formal, too remote from life. We have still to discover, following the French, that literature may be a lively and even exciting matter—that there may be excuse in it

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PREFACE

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for violent enthusiasms and opportunity for very masculine bellicosity—that it is not altogether a thing for schoolmarms, male and female. This book has apparently helped certain native gentlemen of letters to that discovery, and so I don't regret the hard labour that went into it.

At the moment, of course, greater concerns overshadow all artistic questions, and the arts shrink into feebleness and unimportance. It will be a long while, perhaps, before they recover. But when the time comes at last I have a confident feeling that the view of them hitherto dominant in America will be considerably overhauled—that the inevitable transvaluation of values will release them, at least to some extent, from the stupidity and oppression that have borne down upon them in the past—that they will share in the profits of a general revolt against Puritanism and its dour tyrannies. That is a hope, however, and not a prophecy. All systems of culture have defects as well as merits; we must learn to accept the bitter with the sweet. It may be that ours, for all its bold imagination in other directions, is inherently antagonistic to the free play of the aesthetic spirit. But, as I say, we may hope, and hoping, we may plead, expound and expostulate.

MENCKEN.

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